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AUTHOR Pyecha, John N.; Morra, Linda
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ABSTRACT

The paper explains the design of a national survey which was intended to identify factors associated with variations in the properties and contents of individualized education programs (IEPs); provide descriptive information about the target population; the nature and setting in which special education services are provided to this population; assess changes in significant properties of IEPs from one year to the next; and provide insights into the extent to which the services actually provided to handicapped students coincide with those specified in their IEPs as mandated by P.L. 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act). Section One provides an introduction with information on background of the survey; survey objectives; design related activities (literature review, exploratory site visits, and development of instrumentation); and procedures for analyzing IEPs and enrollment data in Curriculum Information Center files. A second section outlines the 10 basic evaluation questions to be addressed in the survey, objectives of the State Facility Substudy, components of the Retrospective Longitudinal Study, and confidentiality procedures. (SBH)

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A National Survey of Individualized Education Programs (IEPS) for Handicapped Children: Overview of Survey Design

by

John N. Pyecha
Research Triangle Institute

Linda Morra
Bureau of Education for the Handicapped
U.S. Office of Education

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Design of a National Survey of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for Handicapped Children

I. INTRODUCTION

Written Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for all handicapped children are required by the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (as amended by P.L. 93-380 and P.L. 94-142). Section 618(d) of the Act also requires that a national survey be conducted to describe IEPs in order to assist Congress in evaluating the usefulness of these documents. As a result, the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (BEH), USOE, has contracted with the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) to design and conduct a survey of the properties and contents of IEPs.[1] The contract to design and conduct the IEP survey was awarded in three one-year phases. The first phase (October 1, 1977 to September 30, 1978) involved the survey design; the second phase (October 1, 1978 to September 30, 1979) covered the actual conduct of the survey, from sample selection through the preliminary data analyses; and the third phase (October 1, 1979 to September 30, 1980) covered final data analyses and reporting. A description of the survey design is presented in Section II.

A. Background

The enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-142) marks the most recent and sweeping gain in the right of handicapped children to a free and appropriate public education. This landmark legislation requires full educational opportunities for all school-aged handicapped children, including those in public or private institutions. BEH, USOE, has been given responsibility for administering and evaluating implementation of this law, and for providing the Congress with an annual report of the status of implementation of the law.

The Act specifies a number of activities that schools must engage in to insure that handicapped children receive a free, appropriate public education. One such activity is the development of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for each child identified as needing special education or related services. The Act requires that this document include the child's educational performance level, the annual goals and short-term instructional objectives for the child, the specific educational and related services to be provided and the anticipated duration of such services, the extent to which the child will be able to participate in regular educational programs, and appropriate evaluation criteria and procedures.

While the Act specifies the basic content required for the IEP and the basic procedures for its development, it leaves considerable discretion to the local schools as to format and specificity. For example, the contents of IEPs may be broadly or specifically stated; they may contain one goal statement, or several goal statements; they may contain objectives stated in general terms, or in measurable behavioral terms. IEPs may vary considerably in length and in the number of persons involved in their development. They may come in a

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[1] U.S. Office of Education Contract No. 300-77-0529.

variety of formats, and they may vary in the extent to which their formats are common within a school, school district, or state. The intent of the national survey described herein was to assess the nature and extent of this potential variability in local implementation of the IEP mandate.

B. Survey Objectives

Little is known about the state-of-the-art across the nation relative to the properties and contents of IEPs and the process whereby they are developed. The major objective of the national survey was to describe the properties and content of IEPs prepared for a national sample of handicapped students in the 48 contiguous United States. As secondary purposes, the national survey was designed to: (1) identify those factors that are associated with variations in the properties and content of IEPs; (2) provide descriptive information about the target population, the nature and setting in which special education services are provided to this population, and the process whereby IEPs are developed; (3) assess changes in significant properties of IEPs from one year to the next; and (4) provide insights into the extent to which the services actually provided to handicapped students coincide with those specified in their IEPs.

C. Design Related Activities

During the first year of the study (1 October 1977 to 30 September 1978), four major activities were undertaken to obtain the background information required to develop and test a strategy for assessing the content and properties of IEPs and to design a national survey in which such an IEP assessment scheme could be applied; i.e., (1) a review of related literature was conducted, (2) exploratory site visits were made to selected public schools and state facilities in five states, (3) copies of IEPs and supporting documentation, collected during the exploratory site visits for a sample of students served by the site-visited public schools and state facilities, were analyzed, and (4) enrollment data for all public schools in the nation (including those special schools administered by public school systems to serve handicapped students) were extracted from a machine-readable data file prepared by the Curriculum Information Center (CIC)[2] and analyzed to provide information related to sample design. These activities are overviewed below; a detailed presentation is presented in the Phase I report.[3]

1. Literature Review

A review and analysis of relevant literature was conducted and a file of these materials was established. Brief summaries of each paper or report included in the file were prepared and distributed to each member of the study team to acquaint them with general topics addressed in the literature. Materials were arranged in a project file corresponding to the major

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[2] Curriculum Information Center, Incorporated, 600 Ross Building, 1726 Champa Street, Denver, Colorado, 80202.

[3] Pyecha, J. N., et al. Design of a National Survey of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for Handicapped Children. Research Triangle Park, N.C.: Research Triangle Institute, November 1978.

topical areas and were filed for easy access by study team members through a centralized checkout system.

2. Exploratory Site Visits

Members of the RTI study team made site visits to SEAs, Local Education Agencies (LEAs), and state facilities in a total of five states to: (a) obtain background information for designing the survey; (b) explore various approaches for selecting student samples; (c) field-test items for the four questionnaires developed for the study (Student Characteristics Questionnaire, School Characteristics Questionnaire, School District Characteristics Questionnaire, and State Facility Characteristics Questionnaire); and (d) obtain a sample of IEPs for use in developing and testing a strategy for evaluating their properties and content. A total of 4 SEAs, 11 LEAs, and 9 state facilities were visited by two- or three-person teams.

SEA and LEA site visits were made over a period of three months (December 1977-February 1978); state facilities were visited in June 1978. The site-visit teams spent one-half to one day at each SEA, two and one-half to three days at a total of two or three LEAs in each state, and one-half to one day at each state facility discussing the IEP process with involved personnel, obtaining a sample of IEPs, and field-testing questionnaire items. In addition, the site-visit team members selected and reproduced a sample of IEPs at each school or facility. This IEP collection activity served as a field-test of procedures for sampling, collecting, and reproducing IEPs at school sites. Furthermore, these collected IEPs were used to develop and test an approach for describing and assessing the properties and content of IEPs.

A total sample of 278 IEPs, and their supporting documentation, were either reproduced (less any personally identifying information) and brought back to RTI by the site-visit teams, or reproduced by school personnel and mailed directly to RTI. Of this total, 215 were collected in public schools; the remaining 63 were collected in state facilities.

3. Development of Instrumentation

The instrumentation package that was developed and field-tested for the survey consists of a checklist for compiling descriptive data about the properties and content of IEPs, and four questionnaires and two protocols for collecting additional required information. Following are brief descriptions of these instruments.

a. IEP Evaluation Checklist

The IEP Evaluation Checklist was the major instrument developed on which to compile data on the properties and content of IEPs. Each IEP collected in the national survey was reviewed carefully at RTI by a trained evaluator who then entered or checked the appropriate information on the IEP Checklist. The major purpose of this checklist was to describe the essential characteristics and content of IEPs. To provide these descriptive data, the checklist included approximately 500 response options grouped under 16 general information headings. These general information headings requested descriptive data regarding to what extent and in what format mandated information was

included in IEPs,[4] and to what extent and in what format additional information was included to improve the viability of these documents as instructional plans.

b. Student Characteristics Questionnaire

The Student Characteristics Questionnaire was a two-page questionnaire to be completed for each student in the survey sample by the teacher most knowledgeable about the student's IEP. This questionnaire provided information regarding the participants in the development and approval of IEPs, the service settings in which students received the special educational services specified on IEPs, the proportion of the academic week that students spent receiving these special services, and the characteristics of students receiving special educational services in public schools and state facilities.

c. School Characteristics Questionnaire

The one-page School Characteristics Questionnaire was completed by the principal of each school in the sample, during the time that IEPs were collected in his/her school by the RTI survey specialist. This instrument was used to provide basic descriptive information about the type of school, type of community, and available special education resources. These data were used to describe the schools in which children in the sample were being served, and to determine the existence of significant relationships between school characteristics on one hand, and the properties and content of the IEPs and the types of special services being provided on the other hand.

d. School District Characteristics Questionnaire

The one-page School District Characteristics Questionnaire was completed by the school district superintendent or his/her designee. This instrument provided descriptive information about the resources for handicapped students in the districts in which the sampled schools were located. In addition to describing the districts, the data were used to determine the existence of significant relationships between selected district characteristics and, (1) the properties and content of the IEPs and, (2) the types of special services being provided.

e. State Facility Characteristics Questionnaire

The three-page State Facility Characteristics Questionnaire was completed by the director or other appropriate personnel at each of the facilities

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[4] Section 602 of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-142) states that an IEP shall include "(A) a statement of the present levels of educational performance of such child, (B) a statement of annual goals, including short-term instructional objectives, (C) a statement of the specific educational services to be provided to such child, and the extent to which such child will be able to participate in regular educational programs, (D) the projected data for initiation and anticipated duration of such services, and (E) appropriate objective criteria and evaluation procedures and schedules for determining, on at least an annual basis, whether instructional objectives are being achieved."

in a special sample of state facilities. The data from this questionnaire were used for basically the same two purposes as the School Characteristics Questionnaire and the School District Characteristics Questionnaire; i.e., the data were used to describe the facilities in the sample, and to determine the existence of significant relationships between selected state facility characteristics and, (1) the properties and content of IEPs and, (2) the types of special services being provided.

f. Level 2 Substudy Protocol

The six-page Level 2 Substudy Protocol outlined the field procedures to be followed in collecting data for a small subsample of students. This data collection activity was carried out by RTI professional staff members or consultants and consisted of interviewing the student and relevant staff (e.g., teachers, parents, school principal, special education coordinator). The collected data consisted of narrative summaries of record reviews, observations, and personnel interviews. These data were used to describe the services received by students and to compare the special education program as documented in the IEP with the special education program as actually implemented, and to determine the nature of and reasons for discrepancies.

g. Sampling Information Protocol

The Sampling Information Protocol outlined the procedures to be followed by RTI survey specialists in collecting certain school and school district related information (including enrollment sizes) via contact with the school district superintendent. These data were intended to meet two needs. First, the data were used, along with other available data, as a basis for selecting sample schools within each sample district. Second, the data were used to describe schools and school districts in which students receiving special education services were enrolled.

4. Analysis of IEPs

Two types of analyses were conducted on the IEPs collected during the site visits. The first was a study of rater/instrument reliability; the second was a study of the variation that exists within and between students, schools, and school districts for key properties of IEPs.

The rater/instrument reliability study played a major role in the development of the IEP assessment strategy (i.e., the use of the IEP Evaluation Checklist described above). The primary objectives of this study were to: (a) verify the estimate of time required per IEP to complete the IEP Evaluation Checklist, (b) identify problem items so that necessary modifications could be made to the checklist and/or to the instructions for using the checklist, (c) assess the viability of the IEP Evaluation Checklist as a method for summarizing survey data related to the properties and content of IEPs, and (d) provide data to assist in determining the training requirements of personnel who complete the checklist.

To accomplish these objectives, six different persons used the initial draft of the IEP Evaluation Checklist to describe and/or rate the key properties of a sample of 64 IEPs. These key properties were identified with the assistance of BEH personnel and other experts in the provision of special

education for various handicapping conditions. The degree of agreement in the codes applied to each of the checklist items by the six raters was analyzed. Items that had low interrater reliability were either revised, excluded from the checklist, or supported with additional instructions and definitions. The results of this study substantiated the checklist as a viable method for assessing the properties and contents of IEPs, and indicated that the checklist could be applied effectively by trained junior professionals. Application of the checklist required approximately 25 minutes per IEP.

The second study, termed Variance Component Substudy, was designed to provide insight into the magnitude of variability in IEP characteristics both between and within candidate stages of sampling activity. For this substudy, a professional staff person used 11 key IEP Evaluation Checklist response items to rate each of the 215 IEPs that were collected from public schools during the exploratory site visits. These item responses were keyed into a computer-readable format and appropriately analyzed. The results suggested that the variance in estimating the prevalence of key IEP Evaluation Checklist response options pertaining to properties and content is attributable primarily to differences between LEAs, to a lesser extent to differences between schools within an LEA, and to a very limited degree, to differences between students within a given school in an LEA. As such, the national sample of students wa distributed across a large number of LEAs and schools (as opposed to being tightly clustered within a relatively small number of districts and schools).

5. Analysis of Enrollment Data in CIC Files

The CIC files contain data reflecting enrollment and grade classification for every public school in the nation. In addition, the files furnish a means of identifying special education schools as well as regular public schools that provide special classroom(s) for the handicapped (by elementary and high school).

Enrollment data were extracted from this file at the public school district level and cross-classified by district size and presence of various possible configurations in the district (i.e., districts having or not having special education schools; elementary school(s) having or not having special classroom(s) for the handicapped; and high school(s) having or not having special classroom(s) for the handicapped. Similar cross-tabulations were made on enrollments in schools). In both instances, national- and state-level summaries were generated.

These enrollment data provided a convenient vehicle for introducing stratification into the sample design and for quantifying the expected number of sample students by type of school. In addition, they facilitated the proportional allocations of the student sample to special education versus regular schools.

II. SURVEY DESCRIPTION

As previously stated, the national survey of IEPs included the Basic Survey and two substudies: a State Facility Substudy and a Retrospective Longitudinal Substudy. The Basic Survey provided answers to ten basic evaluation questions about the IEPs and characteristics of students in the target

population, and about the type and service setting of the special educational services these students received (as specified in the IEPs). The State Facility Substudy addressed a similar set of questions about students in state facilities. The Retrospective Longitudinal Substudy, which consisted of two levels, was an exploratory substudy designed to provide insights into changes that occurred over time in the properties and contents of IEPs. As such, this substudy could lay the groundwork for future studies to assess progress relative to enhancing the utility of IEPs and implementing the mandates of P.L. 94-142. Level 1 of the Retrospective Longitudinal Substudy addressed a question about changes that occurred in significant properties of IEPs that had been prepared within the same LEA for the target population over two consecutive years; Level 2 of this substudy explored answers to three questions about the nature of special education services actually received over two consecutive years, the degree to which the type of services received coincided with those specified in IEPs, and how knowledgeable students and their parents were about the IEPs.

The Basic Survey and its substudies are described below in Subsections A, B, and C. Included in these descriptions are the specific questions that the Basic Survey and Substudies addressed. These 19 research questions were developed jointly by BEH staff and the RTI project team, and as such, represent the concerns and information needs expressed by various BEH staff personnel. Answers to these questions will provide data for the Commissioner's Annual Report to Congress, as well as provide data for helping to meet the basic information needs of those concerned with administering, implementing, and monitoring P.L. 94-142 at state and Federal levels.

RTI fully recognizes the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of all collected data in order to protect the rights and privacy of survey participants. Consequently, a comprehensive set of confidentiality procedures were established for the survey. These procedures are discussed later in Subsection D.

A. Description of the Basic Survey

The major objective of the Basic Survey was to describe the properties and content of a national sample of IEPs. Secondary objectives included the identification of factors associated with variations in the properties and content of IEPs, and the provision of descriptive information about the handicapped children being served as required by P.L. 94-142. Specifically, the Basic Survey was intended to provide answers to the following research questions:

1) What do IEPs Look Like? Answers to this question provided descriptive information about the format and general features of IEPs; e.g., the number of pages they contained, the number and type of specific headings they contained, and whether the information requested by IEP headings was actually entered on the IEP. This general descriptive data provided insight into: (a) how SEAs and LEAs interpreted the IEP-related mandates of P.L. 94-142; (b) the importance that school, LEA, and SEA personnel attached to various types of information; and (c) a measure (as reflected by the extent to which IEP headings were filled in) of LEA and SEA programs for supervising or monitoring the development of IEPs. This information could be of value in determining the need for various types of inservice programs for improving IEPs.

2) What kinds of information do IEPs contain? This question focused on the content of IEPs, i.e., the extent to which they contained the information mandated by Section 602 of P.L. 94-142 and other types of information deemed important by LEA personnel. Answers to this question could provide evidence of the degree to which school districts were complying with the letter of the law.

3) How is information presented in IEPs? This question focused on the means by which IEPs communicated mandated and nonmandated information. This included the explicitness and completeness of the included information.

4) How complete and internally consistent are IEPs? To answer this question, IEPs were placed in five completeness/internal consistency levels that focused on overall completeness and internal consistency. The distribution of documents across these levels, along with the answers to question 4, provided information related to the intent of the law that IEPs communicate clearly to the student's parents and future teachers what the planning committee's intention was when they assigned the student to a special program.

5) Who participates in the development and approval of IEPs? Answers to this question described the number and position (by title or relationship to the student) of persons whose signatures appeared on IEPs as having developed and/or approved the plans, and an indication of the nature of the student's and of his/her parents' or guardians' participation in the IEP process (participation information, because it was not generally provided in IEPs, was obtained by the Student Characteristics Questionnaire). Such information could provide insights into the IEP development process, possibly identifying an area that could be enhanced by inservice training and/or instructional guidelines.

6) What types of special educational and related services are specified in IEPs? In answering this question, educational services were specified in terms of such functional areas as reading or oral or written English, mathematics, science, social science, social adaptation, self-help skills, emotional, physical education, motor skills, speech, visual acuity, hearing, and vocational/prevocational. Included were distributions of the number of different services and combinations thereof, received by students.

7) In what service setting, and for what proportion of the academic week, do students receive the special educational services specified in IEPs? To answer this question, the service setting was defined as a resource room, self-contained special class, special day school, residential school, hospital program, homebound program, and regular classroom. The proportion of the academic week that children spent receiving special educational services and the staff/child ratio also were analyzed.

8) What are the characteristics of the students receiving special educational services in public schools, and of the schools and school districts in which they are enrolled? This question was

answered in terms of: (a) such student characteristics as age, grade, race, sex, handicapping condition, and whether or not the student had been referred by the LEA to state facility for services; and (b) such school characteristics as size of regular student and special education student enrollment, urban/suburban/rural designation, school resource level, grade-level or age-group organizations, and other "special" characteristics (e.g., special public school for handicapped).

9) How do the type, service setting, and amount of special education services specified in IEPs vary by selected student and school characteristics? Answers to this question were obtained by analyzing the answers to questions 6 and 7 for IEPs that had been classified by student and school characteristics selected from those identified in question 8. The identification of student and school characteristics that were significantly related to the answers to questions 6 and 7, as well as those obtained in answer to question 10 below, could be useful for identifying subpopulations for which the implementation of P.L. 94-142 appeared to be quite successful, or for which implementation of the law was problematic. Depending upon the characteristics of the subpopulations for which problems were identified, and upon the nature of these problems, resolution strategies (e.g., inservice training programs) could be formulated and implemented.

10) How do the format, properties, content, and development process of IEPs vary by selected student and school characteristics? Answers to this question were obtained by analyzing the results obtained for questions 1-5 with IEPs classified by the student and school characteristics selected from those identified in question 8. These results could be used to make program and policy decisions similar to those noted for question 9.

The target population for the Basic Survey was all children in 47 of the 48 contiguous United States (New Mexico is excluded) and the District of Columbia who were, as of 1 December 1978: (1) between the ages of 3-21 inclusive, (2) enrolled in a public elementary or secondary school administered by an LEA, and (3) classified by their place of enrollment as being handicapped. To answer the above questions for this target population, the Basic Survey involved photocopying the IEPs of, and obtaining related descriptive information for, a sample of 2,657 public school students from 507 schools in 208 school districts. This sample of schools, which included 2,126 regular schools and 531 special schools, was spread over 42 states.

A single consolidated multistage cluster design was used to select the samples. This approach was dictated by the lack of a national frame of handicapped students and the need for a cost-effective and operationally manageable allocation of the ultimate student sample. Specifically, the Basic Survey was supported by a stratified 3-stage cluster design with public school districts at the first stage, schools at the second, and students at the third stage. Stratification on the district frame ensured sample dispersion over geography, the presence of various amounts of special education services in the districts, and the presence of enrollments of handicapped students in the districts.

A trained survey specialist visited each school in the survey sample to select the student sample and to complete all data collection activities. After selecting the sample of students (and before leaving the school district), the survey specialist photocopied each sample student's IEP (deleting any personally identifiable information), distributed a School Characteristics Questionnaire to the principal and a Student Characteristics Questionnaire to the teacher primarily responsible for preparing each student's IEP, collected and scan-edited the completed questionnaires (including a School District Characteristics Questionnaire that had previously been mailed to the school district superintendent), and placed a unique ID number on each IEP and questionnaire. This procedure was selected in order to place as little burden as possible on participants. All data were sent to RTI for anonymous processing. Each IEP was coded by applying an IEP checklist at RTI.

The national survey was designed as a descriptive study; consequently, data analyses primarily involved the generation of summary descriptive statistics.

B. Description of the State Facility Substudy

The objectives of the State Facility Substudy were similar to the objectives of the Basic Survey except that the focus was on handicapped children in "state facilities" rather than in public elementary or secondary schools. For purposes of this study, a state facility was defined to include (1) non-LEA administered schools listed in the CIC Directory (generated by the Curriculum Information Center), (2) institutions receiving P.L. 89-313 funds (according to a USOE report), and (3) state facilities listed on a file constructed by the Office of Civil Rights in the fall of 1978. Specifically, the State Facility Substudy is intended to provide answers to the following research questions:

11) What are the answers to questions 1-7 above for the IEPs of students served in state facilities? Answers to questions 1-7 above were reported separately for students served in state facilities, thus providing information on the properties and content of IEPs prepared for students served in these facilities.

12) What are the characteristics of the students receiving special education services in state facilities and of the facilities in which they are enrolled? Students were described by the same characteristics delineated in question 8. State facilities, on the other hand, were described by such characteristics as: type (state-operated or state-supported); purpose (total residential treatment, total day-care treatment, etc.); relationship to SEA (accredited or supervised by); and laws or legal mandates for which IEPs were written.

13) How do the type, service setting, and amount of special education services specified in IEPs vary by selected state facility characteristics? This question was answered by reporting the answers to questions 6 and 7 for students served in state facilities by the facility characteristics identified in question 12 above. As in question 9 above, the identification of significant relationships between the nature of services provided and facility characteristics could be useful in formulating strategies for enhancing the services provided to certain subpopulations of handicapped students.

14) How do the format, properties, content, and development process of IEPs vary by selected state facility characteristics? This question was answered by reporting the answers to questions 1-5 for students in state facilities by the facility characteristics identified in question 12 above, thus identifying any significant relationships that might exist between facility characteristics and important properties of IEPs.

15) How do the answers to questions 1-7 above for students served in public schools differ from answers to the above questions for students served in state facilities? This question provided for comparisons between public schools and state facilities of the properties of student IEPs and the nature of services provided to students.

The target population for the State Facility Substudy was all children enrolled in a state facility in the 48 contiguous United States and the District of Columbia who were, as of January 1979, between the ages of 3-21.

The State Facility Substudy was conducted in conjunction with the Basic Survey by including a sample of 550 students who were served in a total of 73 state facilities (about 8 students were selected from each facility). With one minor exception, all procedures and schedules for collecting, processing, analyzing, and reporting data for the Basic Survey were applicable to this substudy. The exception is that the School and School District Characteristics Questionnaire were replaced by a State Facility Characteristics Questionnaire to collect information on the pertinent characteristics of state facilities required for descriptive and reporting purposes.

C. Description of the Retrospective Longitudinal Substudy

The Retrospective Longitudinal Substudy was conducted at two levels. The first level involved a subsample of 801 of the 2,657 students included in the Basic Survey who had had IEPs prepared for two consecutive years by schools within the same LEA. This subsample was obtained by selecting one student at each of the 508 sampled schools.

The second level involved a subsample of approximately 55 of the 508 students included in the Level 1 subsample. These 55 students were selected by taking one student from each of the sample schools in 25 LEAs.

1. Level 1 Substudy

The objective of the Level 1 Substudy was to assess changes occurring from one year to the next in the properties and content of IEPs, in the process whereby they were developed, and in the nature and setting of the special services they specified as being provided. That is, the Level 1 Substudy answered the following research question:

16) What is the difference between two consecutive school years in the answers to Basic Survey Questions 1-7 above for the same students? To answer this question, the IEP from the preceeding year was collected and analyzed along with the IEP for the current year for each of the students included in the subsample. Collection of data at each school was completed in conjunction with the Basic Survey,

including completion of a Student Characteristics Questionnaire by the special education teacher or other school personnel most familiar with the student's IEP from the preceeding year.

2. Level 2 Substudy

The objectives of the Level 2 Substudy were to supplement the information obtained in the Level 1 Substudy with information about the special education and related services actually received by handicapped students and to assess the degree to which the services actually provided coincided with those specified in the IEPs. More specifically, the Level 2 Substudy provided answers to the following research questions:

17) What is the nature of the special education and related services that students in the subsample actually received? Answers to previous questions about the services provided to handicapped students were based on information gleaned from IEPs. Answers to question 17 were based on interviews, observations, and study of school records. These answers, though they were based on a very small subsample and could not be generalized with adequate precision to the target population, provided important insights about the types of services currently being provided to handicapped students.

18) How do the special education services actually received by students in the subsample compare to those specified in their IEPs? Answers to this question provided insight into the degree to which services specified in IEPs were actually provided.

19) How knowledgeable are parents (guardians) about the IEPs of their children (wards)? While interviewing handicapped students and their parents about the services received during the current and preceeding school years, staff personnel obtained impressions relative to the answers to this question. Though they were highly impressionistic, these findings could provide important insights as to how well the contents of IEPs were communicated to students and parents.

To answer these questions, the sample students' teachers, parents, and other relevant school personnel were interviewed for information about the types of services each student in the sample received, or was receiving, during the two-year time frame covered by the IEPs. Pertinent information also was obtained by reviewing each student's school records and studying his/her current school education program. The education and related services received by each student during each year of the two-year period was determined on the basis of these data and compared to those described in his/her IEP. Such findings were important since they could provide a measure or indication of the validity of the information obtained from IEPs in the Basic Survey about the type and service setting of the special services received by handicapped students.

These interviews, observations, etc., were conducted at the same time data were collected at the school for the Basic Survey.

D. Confidentiality Procedures

RTI has completed, and currently is conducting, numerous data collection activities that are covered by the Privacy Act of 1974, Buckley Amendment, and other regulations. Procedures are implemented regularly to maintain confidentiality of data in accordance with existing legal requirements. In the process of designing this national survey, applicable statements and legislation for P.L. 94-142 were thoroughly reviewed. The procedures used in this survey met the requiremets of confidentiality and the protection of human rights as specified in these acts and legislation.

Prior to initiating data collection activities in the schools, school principals or facility directors were provided with (1) a confidentiality-of-data statement which was prepared jointly by RTI and a member of the Privacy and Information Rights Staff, USOE, and (2) an example letter that the principal (director) could mail to parents of handicapped students in his school in order to obtain their permission for RTI personnel to access the files of their children. The confidentiality-of-data statement noted that data collection procedures planned for the survey were in compliance with both the Privacy Act of 1974 and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, that every precaution would be exercised to protect the identity of every study participant, and that collected raw data would be used only by RTI personnel. The example letter, though not required by the Privacy Act, the Buckley Amendment, or P.L. 94-142, might have been required by local or state policies.

Upon arrival at the school, the survey specialist presented to the school principal or facility director a letter from BEH certifying that RTI was authorized to conduct the study. Each survey specialist also had an RTI identification card.

No personally identifying information about individual participants was left on any of the data collected from any school or facility. All such information was removed from the photocopied IEPs and completed questionnaires before the documents were removed from the premises. However, proper editing and analysis of the data required the capability to link the IEPs and Student Characteristics Questonnaires collected for each student, as well as to link together all data collected at each school and at each LEA. Also a procedure was maintained that permitted recontact with a school if inconsistencies or missing data were noted after the various documents had been forwarded to RTI. These requirements were met, while still protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of data related to participating LEAs and schools, through assignment of ID numbers that permitted RTI to link all documents to their associated students, schools/state facilities, and LEAs. A master list that linked ID numbers to the names and addresses of these schools/state facilities was maintained at RTI and treated as "highly confidential." This list will be destroyed when all data processing and analysis activities have been completed. The linkage between student and teacher ID numbers and names was left at the school/state facility (with the principal/director) with instructions that it be destroyed at the beginning of the 1979-80 school year, at which time the editing of data were completed.